

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

DESIRE

An Exhibition about Sex, Love,
and Lust

Celia Hempton, *Milieu* (detail), 2015. Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 cm



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Gallery B

In the introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault states that in the Victorian Era, “Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction.” The French author refers to that period as the social context of industrial production and the emergence of capitalism, and argues that if sex was repressed with that much vigor, it is because it was incompatible with a full dedication to work. This premise, which is at the basis of his “repressive hypothesis” and which he questions throughout the three volumes of the work, reveals one of the essential aspects of our relationship with sex and sexuality: the possibility of controlling or repressing it is the possibility to control the body, to exercise power over it.

While the philosopher writes from a modern European point of view, his thesis could be extrapolated and applied to the repression of desire and sexuality exercised by the colonizers on the aboriginal American peoples, through Judeo-Christian value system formalized in the Christian religion and enforced by the Catholic Church. It was not until the arrival of the Spanish and English¹, among others, in the Americas that sexual practices beyond their reproductive function became stigmatized and forbidden. The notion of sin, inexistent in practically all of the Amerindian societies, would later allow the control of whole populations through a self-regulatory system that has persisted, to a great extent, until the present.

^[1] In Native American cultures, for instance, the two-spirit (or double) figure was a person who contained both the male and female spirit, thus not conforming to the strict binary categories previously imposed by the colonizers.

Regardless of the fact that power has repressed or manipulated the idea of sexuality over the past four or five centuries, what is clear is that desire has been, and still is, a contested space for the exercise of power; a power that has grown to the extent that the primary political space has reduced; from the great ideological narratives of the 20th century, for example, to 21st-century micropolitics, where the body is the space where we exercise the first and most immediate form of power to which we have access. The body then becomes—especially through its connection to other bodies—a place not only for expression but also for the exercise and enjoyment of power over oneself, of autonomy, of a certain form of rebellion.

Despite the advances made in that direction in the last century, the renewed strength with which conservatives and the alt-right are affecting social norms makes it necessary to protect the spaces of freedom, justice, and dignity acquired through centuries of activism and social struggle—the sexual revolution or the progressive, but still timid, legalization of abortion are but two examples. Nevertheless, both the objective of those struggles and the mechanisms used to win them have changed. From the perspective of sexual diversity, for instance, the aim of the so-called minorities is no longer reduced to having access to models that have been historically reserved for white heterosexual men, but is -or should be- founded on the demand for models that satisfy their specific needs; needs that respond to models that are increasingly diverse and changing.

In that context, *Desire* is an exhibition that celebrates the diversity of sexual drive, desire, and love, and that appeals not to the recognition of the rights—whether legal or de facto—of some individuals or others, but to the recognition of nature itself, deeply dissimilar and deeply human in its dissimilarity, and of love and desire as a driving force of human activity as well as of artistic production. *Desire* advocates for an environment where we all have the same rights to access, exercise, and express our sexuality. The exhibition is therefore not only inclusive but also embraces plurality and love as the only possible vision of an in fact diverse world, and autonomy as the only viable means of controlling the body and its possibilities.

In the exhibition, English artist Celia Hempton offers a contemporary perspective on the relationship of a woman with the body and the gaze, as well as with the digital, in the way that Débora Arango explored the sensual dimension of the female body through her controversial nudes a century before. Along the same lines, Karen Paulina Biswell gives various Colombian women the opportunity to present themselves under their own idea of sensuality, while Argentine artist Noelle Lieber proposes an imaginary universe of archaic men, under the ethnocentric view of a series of “wild” women from the 1920s, and Tala Madani offers a video in which “God” gives lessons on how to practice cunnilingus.

In dialogue with this eminently feminine view, Hugo Zapata explores the female body through sculpture and from a male perspective; Mexican artist Martín Soto Climent explores the inherent femininity not only in women but in all living things through an installation made out of stockings, while Luz Lizarazo also approaches femininity by using stockings in her work, revealing how sometimes different views of the body and desire result in formal and cultural coincidences.

Rodrigo Callejas and Miguel Ángel Cárdenas stretch the boundaries of desire by associating the idea of sex with another form of pleasure, that of food, while Richard John Jones presents a textile work that suggests places for sexual encounters other than the established locations, such as the bedroom or private spaces, similar to what José Pedro Godoy conveys in his paintings. Also in the midst of an exuberant nature, José Sierra Vega experiments with the self-portrait and sensuality in the age of the selfie. Finally, from a different angle, Marta Elena Vélez, Julián Urrego, and Cristina Llano celebrate love as the only way of facing current times, whether in daily life or in politics. Or, as in the case of Sharon Hayes, in both.

By complementing the political, legislative, and legal aspects of gender activism, the exhibition shows how artists have referred to this primeval aspect of human beings through their work and how they have contributed to changing the perception of a subject that is still considered taboo in many places.

Desire is a collection of works that, from different generations, points of view, techniques, and sexual-gender identities, have addressed the concepts of love, desire, and their infinite variants, often on the margins of socially accepted norms, thus contributing to freedom of identity and sexual expression.

Desire celebrates diversity, sexuality, and proximity between human beings, regardless of their characteristics and circumstances, and invites us to explore a side of ourselves that we have been taught to hide, silence, and be ashamed of. The exhibition aims to counteract the dark forces that impose repressive models, not only in terms of sexuality but also, more broadly, in those parameters that make a full life difficult for the sake of values and tradition, including cultural and legislative aspects. Because what is the point of tradition if not to help us understand which models do not work?



José Pedro Godoy, *Cae la noche tropical I (Tropical Night Falls I)*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 254 x 160 cm.

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